

SODA IN THE KITCHEN.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

SIR,—Many people suffer from ill-health without knowing the reason, because their cooks put common washing soda into vegetables. The effect is most injurious; feverish symptoms appear, and total loss of appetite, headache, lassitude, depression of spirits, and all the disagreeable sensations which attend blood poisoning. It is almost universally used in kitchens, and if the cook is in a hurry she takes up a handful of soda out of "a bandy tin," where she always keeps it, and pops it into the saucepan where the green peas are, or into the French beans, spinach, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, or cabbage. In fact, one can hardly eat anything with safety in a house where the cook is in the habit of using soda with all her vegetables, as she puts it into the carrots for her soup, into turnips, parsnips, and split peas, &c. I know many instances of the deleterious effects of soda, and I think it is only right to put householders on their guard, so that they may tell their cooks not to use it in any way where it can possibly come in contact with food. A cook who is in the habit of using it becomes very obstinate, and it is a difficult matter to persuade her to give up the practice. She will say that she cannot get her vegetables to have a good colour without it, but this is only ignorance. All that vegetables require is to be put into a saucepan of boiling water with a good pinch of salt, and the cover of the saucepan should be left a little open. If this is done the vegetables are quickly boiled, and retain a beautiful green colour. Invariably they put them into lukewarm or even cold water, and then the color fades, but if they are at once placed in boiling water the colour is set. I know of a lady who was constantly ill with sick headaches, and obliged to stay in bed for days every week, and her entire health was ruined, simply from the constant use of soda in her kitchen. I happened to engage her head kitchenmaid, and when I as usual gave my orders for no use of soda, and explained to her my reason, she told me the cook in her last place used quantities of it, and that her mistress was nearly always in bed. I wrote to the lady, and told her what the kitchenmaid had said, and she wrote back a very grateful letter. A few years ago there was an account in several of the newspapers of an agricultural dinner, with about 150 guests, and nearly all of them were taken suddenly ill in the night, with violent sickness, fainting fits, and headaches. Fifteen of them died, the food was analysed, and it was discovered that the cook had used quantities of washing soda to soften the split peas for the soup, and everyone who partook of the soup became ill.

Last week I was staying with some friends, and the first night there were peas on the table, of which I ate a few, and I was very restless and feverish all night and awoke unrefreshed with a dull headache and a great weight of depression over me, and my mouth was hot and uncomfortable and I had no appetite the following day. In the evening there were again peas at dinner, and I again took some of them. I went to bed early, as I felt very tired and unwell, and I never slept at all during the night, but tossed about and could not rest for a moment, and felt sick and faint, and in the morning I had a headache and felt very miserable. I then felt convinced that the cook was using soda in boiling her vegetables, and I asked my hostess the question, and she said that she always put it into her cooking, and she had happened to have a fresh supply of soda the day I arrived. My hostess, who is naturally very strong and healthy, is now hardly ever well, and is constantly obliged to stay in bed with sick headaches and feverish sensations, and I impute her want of health almost entirely to the constant use of soda in her food. Last year there was a large shooting party staying in a country house not far from where I live, and, to the great discomfort of the hostess, nearly all the guests were suddenly taken ill; as many as were well enough left the next morning. Every sort of thing was thought of as to the cause of the illness, copper saucepans were examined, and the vegetables were at last suspected to be the cause. The water was examined, and the drainage of the house. The whole cause of the sufferings of the guests was the generous use of soda in the vegetables. This sort of thing occurred several times, and it was particularly noticed that whenever the cook was hurried people in the house got ill, which can easily be explained: the more soda she used the quicker her vegetables would be boiled, as soda makes them into a perfect squash in a few moments. The origin of the use of this unwholesome mineral alkali in so many kitchens is because bicarbonate of soda, although it is very unwholesome and bad for the digestion, is allowed to be used in cooking, and ignorant cooks think the common washing soda is the same, and use it freely whenever they wish to do so. Think of the effect of soda on a greasy saucepan; when it is used all grease and stain of any kind instantly comes off; and think then of the effect of soda on the digestive organs. I am firmly convinced a great deal of the indigestion which so many people suffer from is caused by the deleterious effects of soda, used almost universally by unthinking and ignorant people. I always feel nervous about eating vegetables in strange houses, hotels, &c., as I have several times suffered much from eating them. I stayed one night at a well-known hotel in Dorsetshire some years ago, and ate a few French beans or spinach at dinner, and the result was a bad headache, depression, and feverishness. I was on a driving tour, and gladly I left the hotel next morning and felt refreshed and invigorated by the afternoon, after a lovely drive through the sweet, fresh air of the Blackmoor Vale country, and was glad to reach my Somersetshire home, where soda was a forbidden article to avoid putting temptation in the cook's way.—Yours, &c.,

Sept. 4.

SOMERSETSHIRE.